

JOHN MILTON MEETS GALILEO
(At Bellosguardo)

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Song came to Science on that epoch day
When youthful Milton found the Tuscan Seer,
His heart a pendulum vibrating swift
In presence of the man who knew the stars.
This doubly hallowed house could tell the world
Miltonic history—that the two were there,
And struck the finer chords of thought and speech—
The one with face ravined, and deeply scarred
With channels worn of conflict and revolt,
The other with a face refined and pure,
And like a crystal lake reflecting all
The ranges of his thought and heights of soul—
Soft hair, and body slightly built to sing
The grander music and the softer air.
A moment's hesitation, then he spoke:
"John Milton is my name, and some are pleased
To call me England's poet. I have come
Responsive to desire to see the man
Whose work receives the homage of the world."

Galileo:

I thank you Son of Song! You honor me:
I used to write light verse myself—in youth,
But yours has stature. They are stately lines—
Sonorous as the sound of surf on sand.
Fame has preceded you. Two years ago
I heard *Il Penseroso*, and it brought
'A dim religious light' when days were dark.

Milton:

My thanks to you! There is no greater praise
Than you should quote my lines, But I would learn
From you, and of this gracious hour make
A memory to brighten all my years!

Galileo:

That is most kind of you. I'd even give
The honor of this visit to have been
The first to think of telescopes—but then—
I could improve on them. The Dutch
Were satisfied with what they did—a thing



Once understood has lost its charm to some—
They went no farther, but my mind could see
That there were lenses greater to be made,
And many worlds by them to be brought near.

Milton:

A thing well understood, to you is goad
To drive to fields untried. Inertia is
Not overcome by resting on past deeds.

Galileo:

No, verily. If I could work unvexed
I never should grow old. No hand can choke
My spirit. Without eyes I teach and lecture:
Pupils come as eager for my help
As when I taught in Padua and Venice.

Milton:

I see they do. These walls are covered thick
With circles, curves and symbols.

Galileo:

Youth believes in me. I give him truth—
The truth of stars.

Milton:

That you should suffer from intolerance!
The light you cannot hide will never fade.
(To Galileo's face came wistfulness)

Galileo:

My Son, the light has gone from these dull eyes,
But in my night are many-minded lamps—
I see more clear than my Inquisitors.
(Milton, his own unconscious prophet, said:)
"Then blindness is for you not tragedy:
The inner vision grows more keen with use—
And thought is what we need: each stellar group
Must have one brightest star—likewise an age—
And this has Galileo!"

Galileo:

That calls for laughter, Son of Song—
Or tears—and I have neither. Poets' eyes
Can see more stars than we astronomers!

Milton:

Would you could lead me to your tower-room.

Galileo:

There you can lead *me*. 'Tis a short ascent
On steps much worn.

(A servant with a lantern leads the way.)

They reach the tower and survey the sky.)

Here is my telescope. I will adjust
It to your eye. I know from years of work
If not from sight, how to direct it—

'Tis a crude device, but it has served me well.

(He stood with face upraised, his roving eyes

Unseeing, and his hand—articulate—held up

Invoking silence before Majesty—

Milton, shaken with desire to learn,

Not knowing that he too, should spend his years

In darkness treading out the wine of song!)

Galileo:

That brilliant star in Lyra moves among
Her smaller stars as queen among courtiers—
'Tis Vega—in two thousand years—and more—
That star will guide the destinies of men.
I found the satellites of Jupiter,
And Venus has no whim I do not know
But I have never fathomed perfidy—
The motives actuating men are veiled
Until they blaze upon me to my hurt—
But these are secrets—torture has no tongue.

Milton:

A strange anomaly of giant minds—
Who makes a quest of stars sees not the pit.
Your pendant lamps amaze me. I see God,
And feel that I have glimpsed infinity.

(They descend the steps, and in the lower room

A fire burns on the hearth.)

Your pendulums declare my hour gone—
An hour so great that none can measure it.

Galileo:

To me it has been one to warm the heart.
I am an old man craving rest and peace—

The peace of understanding. Would that here
Beside this fire my daughter-nun, Celeste,
Could sit to cheer and comfort me,—but no—
Prisons and persecutions live with me,
And rack my soul and body constantly.

Milton:

Master, my heart is rent—it breaks for you.
It is the fate of all great minds and souls
To suffer at the hands of ignorance.
The day will come when that you teach
Will be a household word on children's lips.

Galileo:

You give me courage, Son of Song. 'Tis hard
To reconcile myself with God and Church,
And still be true to Science—but the time
Will come when both will fuse. Posterity
Will never let this bitter warfare last.

Milton:

You have the faith of knowledge. Master, dear,
To leave you now is like forsaking heights
For lower levels; but this hill is proud
To be your home; this writing table rich
To hold your books, within this one
I shall inscribe my name—and then depart.

Galileo:

No, Son of Song, I would not have you go.
Come sit beside me at the fire and read
From your L'Allegro—'tis a cheerful theme,
And I would love the music of your voice.

Milton:

Master, all my heart obeys. My book
Lies there with yours—but first I want to tell—
I have a fever ever burning bright
To write a greater poem. I shall die
Of it unless I set to work. Other poems
May intervene—but this—

Galileo:

Could you reveal its name to me
In confidence?

Milton:

Oh yes—to you, I could deny no word.
For years it has been growing—and its flame
Will kindle fires, I hope, on every hearth,
For it will touch the lives and hearts of men—
I scarce can speak for trembling, Master dear,
So deeply do I feel. Here, close beside you,
In the firelight's glow, I'll whisper it—
Paradise Lost!

Galileo:

Like you I tremble—but I know your power.
If there is Hell you'll make it beautiful.
(*Milton reads the whole of L'Allegro, and then—*)

Milton:

So late the hour Master. I must go.
(*Impulsively he kneels and kisses Galileo's hand—*)

Galileo:

My Son, I'm tired of greatness. I would have
The near, warm things—and tenderness like yours—
You should have been my son—my very own.
Forgive a blind man's liberty, but I
Would know your face. My hands would press your cheek—
And lips—your Eyes?

Milton:

Are bright blue, Master. Now they overflow.

Galileo:

Your hair is soft and fine—a poet's hair
If you must go, I'll send my man to light
You down the hill. I shall invoke the stars!
Good night. Good night!

Truth is as impossible to be soiled by any outward touch as the sunbeam.—JOHN MILTON.

"THE INSPIRED IDIOT"

RUBY GODDARD

THE inspired idiot! Nothing less, nothing more. That was Oliver Goldsmith. The world still reads the *Deserted Village* and the *Vicar of Wakefield*, and lovers of the stage still applaud *She Stoops to Conquer*. But how many know the innate eccentricities of their author and the embarrassments and even agonies those eccentricities brought to him?

Perhaps the most outstanding characteristic of Goldsmith, in his life as well as in his literature, is his profound optimism. Considering his handicaps and the age in which he lived, this is remarkable. Physically he was ridiculous, with a short, dumpy figure, with a face characterized by a weak chin, an insignificant nose, and pitted with small-pox. Added to this he was disfigured at an early age by a disease which left him totally bald, even as to eyebrows, making a wig, with him, a necessity. Sensitive and imaginative, his appearance was a handicap indeed. But a careless, easy facility of disposition, a natural vein of quiet humor, and an amusing eccentricity of manner counteracted his sensitiveness, and made him beloved.

His optimism, combined with a kindness and incompetency, makes him an outstanding figure even among the notable eccentrics, for what other man would be so thoughtless of self, so kind of heart and generous, as to give away to a destitute woman, after bringing her to his college, all his clothes, even to those he wore and his very bed clothing also? Who else, having no money, would reduce him-

self, through charity, to the point of having to cut open his feather-bed and crawl into it for warmth? Who was it that called him a "machine of pity"? The phrase aptly describes him; for when, destitute himself, he resorted to selling his own ballads on the street, he was more liable than not to return home with empty hands, having given his earning to some chance-met person whose need aroused his pity.

Along with his kindness and optimism ran a streak of credulity which made him the dupe of comrades and chance acquaintances who would have kept him poor even if his charity had not. His winning nature and his evident genius won for him gifts from relatives, and loans, which would have made life easier for another man. But the combination of trustfulness to the point of silliness, and charity beyond all reason, was too much for him. Having sold his books and much of his clothing after what he felt to have been a deep disgrace at college, he planned to set out for America. He put his trunk on board the ship, sat down with some companions to play cards while waiting the wind and tide, lost all of his money by dawn, and emerged from the game to find that his ship had sailed! At another time, mounted on a good horse and with some thirty pounds in his pocket—unprecedented wealth for him—gained at cards, he set out for Cork. Seeing a poor woman in tears and hearing her tale of a husband in prison for debt, he gave her all his money that remained after having viewed every-

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